Insights EDIC Workshop

Introduction and Context

The workshop held on the 8th of March in the Hague aimed to introduce the participants to the Netherlands' efforts in progressing towards a European Digital Infrastructure Consortium (EDIC) for Digital Commons. This workshop was part of the Transition Collaboratory on Digital Commons and hosted by Commons Network (CN) and the Ministry for Internal Affairs.

The meeting was kicked off by Matthijs Goense, who facilitated the meeting on behalf of CN. Sophie Bloemen then gave an introductory presentation, presenting the Transition Collaboratory on Digital Commons and the background on the work of Commons Network with a broader civil society coalition in this domain. Public Spaces advisor Wouter Tebbens spoke briefly of the concrete use cases for social media, Fediverse and for Community Media forum, Display.

EDIC Presentation

Lieke van Schouwenburg, EDIC lead with BZK proceeded to introduce the participants to the EDIC project. She covered several aspects of the EDIC project. Firstly, there was background information about EDIC-as-a-tool, covering how such an entity could facilitate multi-country projects particularly in relation to Digital Commons and Infrastructure. The EDIC itself builds on the French report 'Towards a Sovereign Digital Infrastructure of Commons' that calls for a project to develop European digital commons. At the time of writing, the Core Group spearheading this project consists of Germany, Estonia, Netherlands, and France with the Netherlands as a co-chair since October of 2023.

The Netherlands wants to move quickly towards establishing the EDIC. To accomplish this, several requirements must be met. A proposal must be drafted to the European Commission that includes (among others) the agreement for governing the EDIC, the roles of the members, as well as an overview of future implementation strategy. The Netherlands is taking charge of (co)writing the proposal, dealing with the technical aspects of the project, and other aspects of the EDIC proposal.

The *timeline* aims at having the EDIC application ready by August at the latest. The process consists of several steps. The 21st and 22nd of March, the core group will meet in Brussels to

finalise goals and action lines. The core group will continue drafting the application going through rounds of consultation and feedback. Stakeholders are invited to contribute to this process.

EDIC Goals

The presentation also outlines the EDIC's priorities and goals which are as follows:
- Contribute to EU Digital sovereignty
- Promote a multi-stakeholder and inclusive model of digital governance
- Contribute to the development of a digital public space
- Make Europe a leading player in digital commons.

Foreseen EDIC Actions and Activities

The presentation highlighted the draft 'Actions and Activities' of the EDIC (these also included sub-points which are not mentioned here):
- Build a European community for Digital Commons
- Provide smooth access to direct funding
- Support the maintenance, development, and scaling of digital commons
- Contribute to strategic developments regarding digital commons

Warm-up Exercise: What Digital Commons would you like to see?

Participants were asked which concrete digital commons they think the EDIC should work with. Here is a list of the types of digital commons that participants mentioned during the round:
- Place for public debate
- EPD
- Education software
- Office workspace
- Social media
- WiFi federation (NL, EU, World)
- Pub Hubs
- Linked-In equivalent
- Browser
- Creative Tools

Breakout Session

These elements were then discussed in breakout groups, inviting the participants to actively engage with the project and make contributions from their own perspectives. In relation to the draft 'Actions and Activities', participants were asked to either emphasize the points they liked most, modify a point or add a new one. Naturally, this meant that people expressed concerns and enthusiasm for different aspects of the project.

General issues

Defining the Digital Commons. A pressing issue that was shared amongst most of the participants is the lack of a concrete definition and joint understanding of Digital Commons. Digital Commons, despite being researched for many years now still lacks a holistic definition that appeals to all players. For example, some participants equated open source to Digital Commons while others outright rejected this. Participants warned that not having a clear and common understanding might lead to confusion.

Concerns Over Financing and Proposed Solutions. Some concerns were also expressed with regards to financing. Some participants believed that the current budget for the EDIC was too small. On the other hand, some were more optimistic arguing that considering the project's nascent condition, this is still good enough. More generally, there was a consensus that structures should be put in place to secure adequate funding. For example, participants believed that formal terms and conditions ought to be drawn up for both subsidies and procurement.

Open-Governance Structure. Some questions came up regarding governance, and how an open-governance can be ensured wherein an inclusive organizational structure includes multiple stakeholders into the conversation. The EDIC aims to promote the involvement of independent organizations, private entities, local governments, and citizens themselves. This point resonated with all the participants in the room and was revisited throughout the workshop.

Overview Main threads in the discussion.

At the end of the meeting all participants were thanked for their feedback and suggestions. These points will be taken into account when further drafting the application.

- Agreement on many of the proposed action lines.
- Need a *clear vision* for Digital Commons with *shared standards and principles.*
- Digital Commons as a norm
  - Reinforce NL and EU positions as norm builders in the field.
- Ensure the participation of actors from different sectors.
  - Local governments, academics, artists, citizens.
  - Understand their needs and perspectives.
  - Capacity training—provide them with necessary training to enable their participation.
- Systematically facilitate all stakeholders involved.
  - Incubator function - local hubs
  - Transparency and involve actors in all segments of decision-making to maintain the integrity of the commons.

Participating organisations:

Commons Network
Public Spaces
FEPS
Share NL
SIDN Fonds
SURF
Waag FutureLab
VNG
BuZa
EZK
BZK
OCW